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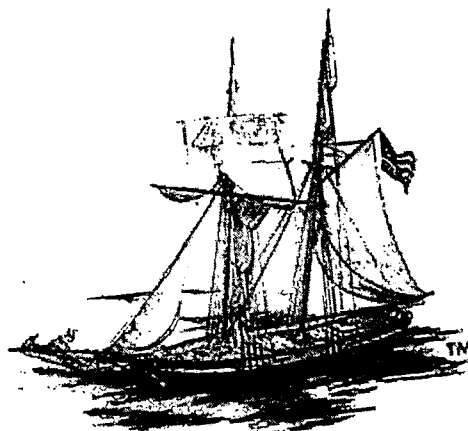
ABSTRACT

Teaching about the Amistad case provides correlations to the National Standards for History, and Civics and Government. An overview of the events of 1839 is given in this lesson plan. Seven student activities include reading and using primary source documents, writing journal articles, viewing the movie "Amistad," and giving presentations. Each of the five primary source documents provided contains an explanation of the historical context. (BT)

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The *Amistad* Case



Lesson Plan

from the

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URL: <http://www.nara.gov/education/teaching/amistad/teach.html>

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The *Amistad* Case

Teaching Activities

Standards Correlations

The following teaching activities correlate to the National Standards for History.

- ☐ Era 4 - Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)
 - ☐ Standard 2D - Demonstrate understanding of the rapid growth of "the peculiar institution" [slavery] after 1800 and the varied experiences of African Americans under slavery.
 - ☐ Standard 3B - Demonstrate understanding of how the debates over slavery influenced politics and sectionalism.
 - ☐ Standard 4A - Demonstrate understanding of the abolitionist movement.

The teaching activities also correlate to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

- ☐ Standard II. B. 1. - Explain how certain characteristics, including a history of slavery, tend to distinguish American society from most other societies.
- ☐ Standard III. B. 1.- Evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding the purposes, organization, and functions of the institutions of the national government.
- ☐ Standard III. D. 1.- Evaluate, take, and defend positions on the role and importance of law in the American political system.
- ☐ Standard V. B. 1.- Evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding personal rights.

Cross-curricular Connections

Share these exercises with your history, government, language arts, and drama colleagues.

Teaching Activities

1. Review with students the meanings of the following terms: schooner, brig, writ of habeas corpus, proctor, and libel. Terms are defined in the text of the online headnotes.
2. Divide students into five groups. Print out the the featured documents and the Written Document Analysis Worksheet, and provide one document and a copy of the worksheet for each group. Ask each group to analyze their document. Using the jigsaw method, regroup

the students to share the information. Lead the class in oral responses to the worksheet questions, and discuss how the documents relate to one another.

3. Ask students to complete a chart similar to the one below comparing the individuals involved in the *Amistad* case. Documents #1 and #2 provide adequate information to compare Thomas R. Gedney and the Africans. Additional research will provide information on President Van Buren, the Spanish Government, the Abolitionists, and the Spanish planters.

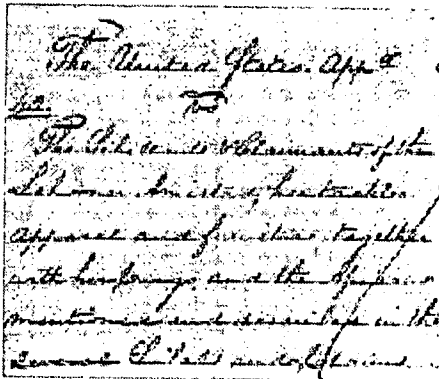
Comparison Chart						
Who?	Africans	Gedney	Van Buren	The Spanish Government	Abolitionists	Spanish Planters
What role did they play in the trial?	(defendants)	.	.	.	(financial & moral support for Africans)	.
What was their motivation?	.	(economic gain)	(political gain)	.	.	.
What were their arguments?	(property rights)
What was the basis for their arguments?	.	.	.	(Pinckney's Treaty)	.	.

4. Ask students to write an article for an 1841 newspaper describing the decision of the Supreme Court in the *Amistad* case. Encourage them to research the provisions of the Congressional Act of March 19, 1819, for background information. To insure that students recognize the differences in sectional reactions to the case, assign students particular newspapers, some in the North and some in the South.

5. Encourage students to write a review of the *Amistad* movie, comparing the film version to the actual events as described in the documents. Ask for student volunteers to share their reviews with the class. Lead a class discussion about the value of preserving the historical integrity of the story and the value of changing that story for a screenplay.

6. Following analysis of the documents, divide students into groups of five. Instruct student groups to write and stage a one-act play about the events and personalities involved in the case. The acts might focus on the formation of the *Amistad* Committee by abolitionists Lewis Tappan, Joshua Levitt, and Symeon Jocelyn; the decision by John Quincy Adams to represent the Africans; the challenges of securing translators for the Africans; and Van Buren's concerns about the election of 1840. Encourage students to quote directly from the documents. Schedule a media specialist to videotape the final productions.

7. Ask student volunteers to research and make an oral presentation to the class comparing the *Amistad* case to other significant incidents related to slavery prior to the Civil War, including Nat Turner's rebellion (1831), the *Creole* revolt (1841), and the Dred Scott decision (1857). Use the following questions to prompt comparisons: To what extent did these incidents involve violence? What were their outcomes? How did they influence



The Amistad Case

"... each of them are natives of Africa and were born free, and ever since have been and still of right are and ought to be free and not slaves ..."

-- S. Staples, R. Baldwin, and T. Sedgewick,
Proctors for the Amistad Africans,
January 7, 1840

Background

In February of 1839, Portuguese slave hunters abducted a large group of Africans from Sierra Leone and shipped them to Havana, Cuba, a center for the slave trade. This abduction violated all of the treaties then in existence. Fifty-three Africans were purchased by two Spanish planters and put aboard the Cuban schooner *Amistad* for shipment to a Caribbean plantation. On July 1, 1839, the Africans seized the ship, killed the captain and the cook, and ordered the planters to sail to Africa. On August 24, 1839, the *Amistad* was seized off Long Island, NY, by the U.S. brig *Washington*. The planters were freed and the Africans were imprisoned in New Haven, CT, on charges of murder. Although the murder charges were dismissed, the Africans continued to be held in confinement as the focus of the case turned to salvage claims and property rights. President Van Buren was in favor of extraditing the Africans to Cuba. However, abolitionists in the North opposed extradition and raised money to defend the Africans. Claims to the Africans by the planters, the government of Spain, and the captain of the brig led the case to trial in the Federal District Court in Connecticut. The court ruled that the case fell within Federal jurisdiction and that the claims to the Africans as property were not legitimate because they were illegally held as slaves. The case went to the Supreme Court in January 1841, and former President John Quincy Adams argued the defendants' case. Adams defended the right of the accused to fight to regain their freedom. The Supreme Court decided in favor of the Africans, and 35 of them were returned to their homeland. The others died at sea or in prison while awaiting trial.

The Documents

Libel of Thomas R. Gedney, Lieutenant, U.S. Brig *Washington*, August 29, 1839

Answer of the Proctors for the Amistad Africans, January 7, 1840

John Quincy Adams' request for papers relating to the lower court trials of the Amistad Africans, January 23, 1841

Opinion of the Supreme Court in *United States v. The Amistad*, March 9, 1841

Statement of the Supreme Court to Circuit Court, March 9, 1841

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sectional differences?

For Further Reading:

Jones, Howard. *Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

The Legal Information Institute at Cornell University has created a web site devoted to the legal issues surrounding the *Amistad* case.



National Archives and Records Administration

URL: <http://www.nara.gov/education/teaching/amistad/teach.html>

webmaster@nara.gov

Last updated: January 29, 1998



Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Map | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram | <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patent | <input type="checkbox"/> Press release | <input type="checkbox"/> Census report |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum | <input type="checkbox"/> Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting letterhead | <input type="checkbox"/> Notations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten | <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Typed | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seals | |

3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT: _____

4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT: _____

POSITION (TITLE): _____

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN? _____

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Why do you think this document was written?

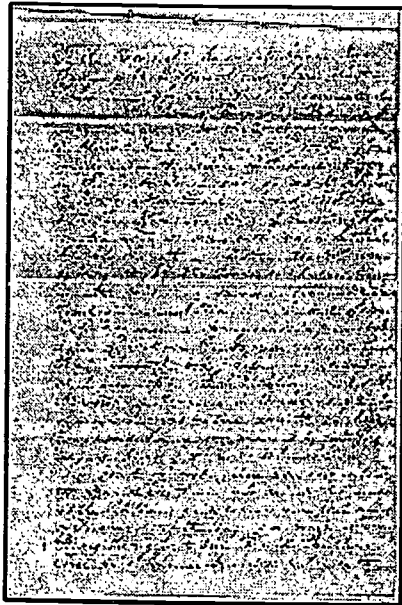
C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:



Document #1



**Libel of Lieutenant Thomas R. Gedney,
on behalf of himself and the officers and crew of the U.S.
Brig *Washington*,
August 29, 1839**

National Archives and Records Administration-Northeast Region,
Waltham, MA,
Records of the District Courts of the United States, RG 21

The *Washington* was the brig that seized the *Amistad* off the coast of Long Island. Its commander was Lt. Thomas R. Gedney. In his libel, or written statement, to Judge Andrew T. Judson of the district court, he described the encounter with the *Amistad*. Because he sought salvage of the schooner and its cargo, he was very detailed in his account and itemized all of its cargo, estimating its value at \$40,000 and the value of the Africans as slaves at \$25,000. In maritime law, compensation is allowed to persons whose assistance saves a ship or its cargo from impending loss. The libelants claimed that with great difficulty and danger to themselves they recaptured the *Amistad* from the Africans. They claimed that had they not seized the vessel, it would have been a total loss to its "rightful" owners. Therefore, Gedney and his crew believed they were entitled to salvage rights. At that time in U.S. history, even individuals acting in their official capacity as officials of the government were entitled to salvage rights.

In addition, Gedney relayed that the Africans could speak only native African tongues and that one of the two Spaniards, Jose Ruiz, spoke English. Gedney included in his libel the account of the mutiny as told by Ruiz.

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District of Columbia. p.

The President of the
United States of America to the
Marshal of the District of Columbia
Greeting -

Whereas a bill is filed in
the District Court of the United States for
said District in behalf of Thomas R.
Graham for himself and others against the
Scholarship Association and other articles of
personal property, which bill is in the
words following, to wit,

To the Honorable Andrew Dudson Esq
Judge of the District Court of the United
States in and for the District of Connecticut

The Libel of Thomas R Gedney Lieut-
enant in the United States Navy commanding
the United States Surveying Brig Washington
employed in the Service of the United States
in the Coast Survey. and on behalf of Richard
W Mead a Lieutenant on board said Brig
and the officers and Crew of said Brig Wash-
ington and all others interested or entitled
humbly sheweth — That on the 20th day
of August AD 1839 the said libellant being
in with said Brig Surveying between Montauk
Point & Gardiners Island in the State of New
York discovered a strange and suspicious looking
Vessel off Culloden Point near said Montauk
Point that they took possession of said Vessel
which proved to be a Spanish Schooner called the
Armistad of Havana in the Island of Cuba
of about 120 tons burthen. and the said libellants
found said Schooner was manned by forty five
negroes. Some of whom had landed near
said point for water & there were also on board
two Spanish Gentlemen who represented and
as the Libellants mainly believe were paid owners
of the Cargo & of the Negroes on board who were
Slaves belonging to said Spanish Gentlemen.
That said Schooner Armistad sailed on the

28th Day of June A.D. 1839 from the Port of Havana
bound to a port in the Province of Principio
both in said Island of Cuba under the Command
of Raymen Ferrer as master thereof, that said
Schooner had on board and was laden with
a large & valuable Cargo Consisting of and Amounting
as the libellant believe to be. 1 box with 4 folding
pieces 1 Crate 11 boxes Crochery of Flapwau. 200 Bags
vermicelli. 15 ps linen Stuff. 1 Case Sugar. 25 Bags
Beans. 25 Bags Raisins. 50 Horse equipments. 10 doz
Morocco Skins. 5 doz Calf Skins. 5 Saddles. 2 doz Kitts
200 feet Ropes. 20 sides Sole Leather. 5 iron Trunks for
warehouse. 8 Crows. 1 Box with 200 Meags. 3 Iron
Kettles. 14 packages Common Linen. 4 packages Holland
linen. 4 doz parasols or umbrellas 30 pieces Muslin 10
yds each. 2 doz yd. Hose 3 doz Ovens 21 Ingots 90 ps
Lilecia 2 ps Victoria 9 ps Drilling 34 ps Long lawn
54 ps Calicoes 5 ps Laces 14 ps Muslins 6 ps Stripes
24 ps Stripes 148 ps Ribbons 10 ps Linen Cambric 45 ps
Glazed Linen 4 ps Roman Cassimere 1 doz Shawls
Frans. Gloves. Shirts. Tapes thread. Towels umbrellas
29 Muslin Dress patterns 10 woolen Shawls 4 Silk
15 Rings Buttons Saddles 75 ps Stripes 48 ps Lilecia
30 ps Long lawn 1 ps Black HKffs 7 ps French Linens
5 doz Linen Cambric HKffs umbrellas 42 ps Stripes
Robbins 2 ps Ribbons 5 Coloured Mantles 20 ps
linen Cambric 800 yds Stained linen 2 ps of Merino
30 Dress patterns 5 Musquito nets 5 ps Satin 18
Blankets 1 box Hardware 12 doz HKffs 18 ps Coarse
linen 50 vols Books. 2 Boxes Books. 70 sheets

of Corker. Hardware 50 Demijohns Olive Oil 20 Boxes
Vermicelli 20 Quintals Pickled Beef 15 Dides Sole Leather
5 Kegs Olives 2 Quintals Ham 190 ps Muslins 21 ps
Stripes 3 ps Brown Drilling 4 ps Linens 21 ps Colours & fine
linens 11 doz Ladies Hose 2 Doz Belts 10 doz Linen
Cambric Handkerchiefs 12 Common L and a large quantity
of Silks Linens Hardware & provisions to the amount
in all of \$40,000 Dollars— And also fifty four
Slaves to wit fifty one male Slaves and three young
female Slaves who were worth Twenty five thousand
Dollars, and while on said voyage from Haranun
to Principe the said Slaves rose upon the Captain
& Crew of said Schooner & killed & murdered the
Captain & one of said Crew & two more of said Crew
escaped & got away from said Schooner, that the
two Spaniards on board to wit Pedro Montes and
Jose Ruiz— remained alive on board said Schooner
after the murder of the Captain and after the said
Negroes had taken possession of said vessel & Cargo
that their lives were spared to assist in the sailing
of said vessel & it was directed by said Negroes
that said Schooner should be navigated for the
Port of St. Louis of said Pedro Montes & Jose Ruiz
directed accordingly then without direction & consultation
by said Negroes at the point of time being in the
day time of the night attack their Commanded
for the American Schooner but after more than ten
months in the Ocean they succeeded in coming round
Montevideo point where they were discovered and

boarded by the libellants and the said two Spanish
Gentlemen begged for and claimed the aid and
protection of the libellants, that said Schooner
was accordingly taken possession of & recaptured from
the hands & possession of said Negroes who had taken
the same as aforesaid that said Schooner was brought
into port of New London in the District aforesaid
where she now is and said Schooner would with great
difficulty exposure and danger have been taken
by the Libellants but for the surprise upon the said
Blacks she had possessed thereof a part of whom were
on shore and but for the aid assistance and service
of the Libellants the said vessel and said Cargo would
have been wholly lost to the respective owners thereof.
That said Cargo belongs to divers Spanish Merchants
& others resident in said Island of Cuba & to the
said Pedro Montes & Jose Ruiz the latter owning
most of said Slaves.

Now inasmuch as the said
Thomas R Gedney & said officers & Crew have with
so much difficulty & danger saved said Schooner
Armistad and said Cargo and said Slaves
which would otherwise in all human probability
have been totally lost to the owners thereof respectively
Will your Honor please to order the said vessel
^{being a Spanish vessel} to be attached and taken by the process of this Hon-
-orable Court and that a monition issue to all
persons concerned to show cause if any they have
why a reasonable Salvage should not be decreed
thereon to the Libellants & all others entitled

And that such further and other steps shall be
taken as the Court of this Honorable Court
shall direct —

This R. Gedney Esq. Com. of the
R. W. Meade Esq. by J. Shammis Esq.
Sind. U.S.A. Washington

District of Connecticut

District Court at New London Aug 20th 1839

Personally appeared Richard W. Meade
and made oath to the truth of the foregoing libel
according to his best knowledge belief —

attest
Chas. F. Ingalls
Clerk

And, Shammis said, that he has been
advised by said District Court, and the best
thing, directed to be done at a Sheriff's
District Court of the United States for said
District to be held at Westbury in said
District on the 19th day of September A.D.
1839, at 10 o'clock A.M. and the Clerk
of said District Court is directed to issue
all necessary and proper process thereon — there
for we command you to take the said
Schuman Amended, and the articles of Personal
liberty mentioned in said libel into your
possession and custody and there detain about

t the well of rain. Cont. Wind fast not
but make an union as return. With
the Hon. Andrew T. Hanson. District Court
of the District of Columbia at Washington
the 29th day of August. A. D. 1839.

Chas. A. Purcell

District of Columbia

Chas.

New Lincoln / Herber / Aug 30th 1839

Then by Virtue of this warrant at said New Lincoln / 2 Miles
from the Harbor / I took into my custody & keeping the aforesaid
disarmed Schooner Armed with her Tackle, apparel & furniture
together with her cargo & intended as aforesaid & there held subject
to the order of the Court to which this warrant is returnable.
And the said cargo being found to be in a damaged state & ready
receiving more damage I have discharged the same & found
the cargo to Inventory as follows to wit

2 Pieces Pickering 2 Hens & a 4 Hens. 68 Pieces Cotton Shirts and
Checks 190 Hens, 2 pieces Cotton Shirts. Gingham 3 1/4 Hens 1. Ditto
8 Hens, 1 ditto 4 Hens 3 pieces Pickering 5 1/2 Hens, 1 Piece Pink Muslin
fig. 17 1/2 Hens, 4 Mosquito Nets, 3 Cotton Hats, 12 blue cotton Shirts
21 Cotton Hats, 3 pieces dark calico 4 Hens 1 Piece blue Muslin 2 Hens
1 Piece brown cotton gauze 22 Hens 10 Pairs Cotton socks, 1 set of
6 aprs, 1 Box artificial flowers, 5 Pieces Massapee Hats, 1 Piece
dark Gingham 8 Muslin aprs, 3 Pieces Cotton lace
3 Pieces Green Cambric 3 Pieces black Muslin, 3 Pieces white
Cotton lace 1 piece each lace 1 piece white cotton lace 1 piece
1 Piece Cotton gauze Laylock 8 Hens 1 set of black 11 Hens, 1 ditto
Thighs 20 Hens 2 pieces white cotton lace 5 pieces checked gingham
70 Hens 4 Pieces Pickering 3 1/4 Hens 9 pieces tabling 17 1/2 Hens
10 pieces checked cotton 180 1/2 Hens 5 pieces striped Tann 90 1/2 Hens

9 pieces Light Stripes - Gingham 2 1/2 yds. 1 Bale Stripes, Pickering 2 yds.
 1 Bottle 7 yds. 1 Box dry goods P.M. 1 Box Madras 2 1/2 yds. P.M. 1 Bale Cotton Stripes.
 4 Checks 2 yds. 1 Box Linen 4 1/2 yds. 12 Collins Handkerchiefs. 11 Shirts. 1 yd. Enchant
 Muslin 1 1/2 yds. 9 yds. Gingham (each 15 yds.) 135 yds. 3 yds. ditto. one dress in each
 yd. 1 yd. Black Maria full yds. 1 yd. ditto. 4 1/2 yds. 6 yds. Linen 4 1/2 yds. 3 yds. ditto
 Stripes 40 yds. 1 yd. Salin gauge 11 yds. 3 yds. Black Maria 11 yds. 5 yds. Brass plate
 for Bonnet. Pair of yd. light duck. 46 yds. Stripes & checks 123 yds. 25 yds. Gingham
 2 1/2 yds. 6 yds. Pickering 2 1/2 yds. 1 yd. Calico 11 yds. 1 Bale dry goods R.B. No 14. 1 Bale
 ditto R.B. No 16. 1 Bale ditto R.B. No 12. 1 Bale ditto R.B. No 13. 1 Bale ditto
 A y L. No torn off. 1 Box Umbrellas R.B. No 18. 1 Box containing 34 coils wire. 4 packages
 and 61 cone glass knobs. 1 Box dry goods R.B. No 4. 1 Box ditto R.B. No 5. 1 Box ditto
 T No 4. 1 Trunk measuring apparatus No 10. (Supposed to be the Capt's) 1 Box 25 yds. galon.
 6 yds. Ribbons. 10 yds. Symp. 6 yds. pipes. 1 Box thread & lace. 26 fans. 1 set. ditto. tatters.
 1 Box needles. 1 Box Ribbons & 3 Bunches quills. 1 Box **IT**. 40 yds. Muslin. 1 Bundle
 skins 56 skins. 5 Bundle Umbrellas. 26. 22 pair Buttons. 6 Sticks. 11 British pin
 7 Shirts. 3 Coats. 3 hats. 3. Clocks. 10 Clocks bags. 5 Empty trunks. 35 linings
 olive oil. 196 Boxes Vermaselli **SC**. 2 Boxes ditto partly filled **SC**. 7 Boxes. Raisins
SC. 1 Box Glass **R.B.** No 16. 1 Box ditto **R.B.** No 8. 1 Part box charts **IT**. 12 Boxes
 Castile Soap **SC**. 2 ditto part full **SC**. 1 Box dry goods **T**. 1 Box ditto **R.B.**
 No 16. 1 Box ditto. A y L. No 4. 1 Box ditto **T** No 3. 1 Box ditto **T** No 5. 1 Box
 ditto **P.M.**. 1 Box ditto **R.B.** No 6. 1 Box Soap **R** (part full). 1 Box. Books **A**
 1 Box part full of books **R.B.** No 15. 5 Muskets (in last order) 1 Box crockery
R.B. No 7. 1 Box Leather **A.R.** C. 1 Box Short. Copper **C.M.** No 8. 1 Looking glass
 in mark. 1 Box crockery **R.B.** No 11. 1 ditto **R.B.** No 9. 1 Bale Calf skins **T.V.** No 2.
 1 ditto No 3. 1 Box crockery **R.B.** No 4. part full. 1 Box Horse equipments **T.V.** No 1
 1 Box dry goods **A y L.** No 11. 1 Box crockery **R.B.** No 6. 1 ditto No 3. 1 ditto No 5
 1 Empty box. 1 Empty linings. 1 Box pitch **P & C**. 1 Box Snuff **C.M.** C. 1 Small
 rock window blinds. 1 Machine compass (brass) 1 Sp. glass. 5 papers of Copper
 (Ground). 2 Horse pistols. and one pocket ditto. 7 yds. dry plate loose blue & green
 edged. 22 Tumbler. and one desanter. 8 glass dishes (loose). 4 tinplate (loose) 2 long

bottles (contents unknown). 1 Box dry goods A. L. No. 9. 1 ditto A. L. No. 2. 1 ditto A. L.
 1 ditto A. L. No. 8. 1 ditto A. L. No. 4. 1 ditto A. L. No. 1. 1 ditto A. L. No. 16. 1 ditto
 A. L. No. 5. 6 pictures. 1 Box dry goods R. B. No. 1. 1 ditto A. L. No. 3. 3 skins
 of S. C. 1 Bundle twine 46 Skins. 2 Bundle. 21 Sticks Carriage tops. 1 Key of
 iron wedges. 1 Saddle. Bridle. & Whittens. 1 Roll Morocco skins D. C. 2 Sivers. and part
 13th piece. 12 bags ditto (Coke in bag order) 1 Box Machinery E. F. (Saw Knives) 1 Key
 of brass E. R. O. 1 Box Screws. 6 Saw Augers. 1 Spike gimblet. 1 Box containing 48
 packages of fancy articles comb be. R. B. 1 Roll Solo Leather C. B. 4 Rolls of
 Solo Leather J. V. Nos. 4. 5. 6. 7. and also a quantity jerked beef.

Attest Morris Wilcox M. L. Marshall
 for Capt. Scott

District of Columbia

1200 Louisiana Street. 30th 1859

When I took into my custody, & keeping by order of the foregoing,
 pursuant of Law no forty three out of the fifty four slaves within
 Maryland to wit forty slaves & three females having all been sold
 to find within my precinct, whose names are as follows viz
 Cinquay, Antioch, Dorothea, Co. boy, Dorothea, Fannie, 1st Dorothea,
 Malwah, Dorothea, Conamah, Choolay, Annah & (Baah, Gabbah, Poomah,
 Kimbo, Poca, Wangyeah, Saah, Carlee, Parah, Mörrah, Nahonie,
 Narguoi, Quarta Hope, Con, Fannie, & Kimah, Laromana,
 Puhpanah, Baah, Chahoy, Puhgumash, Annie, Fannie, Chackmanaw,
 Chahoy, Carre, Fannie, Kene, Mahgra Pia & three children subject
 to the order of this Court to which the servant is returnable.

Attest Morris Wilcox M. L. Marshall
 for Dir. of Prison

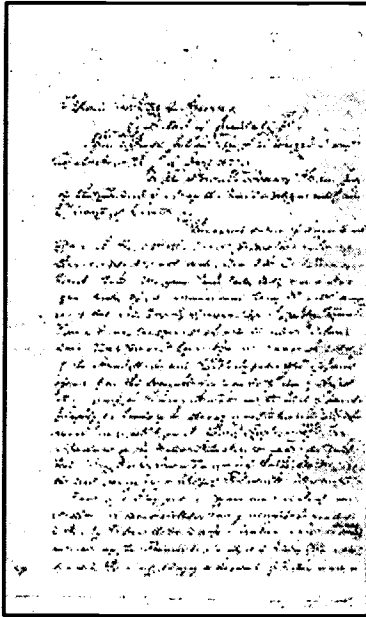
Morris R. Gedney

Belona Amato

Morris R. Gedney



Document #2



**Answer of S. Staples, R. Baldwin, and T. Sedgewick,
Proctors for the *Amistad* Africans,
to the several libels of Lt. Gedney, et. al. and Pedro
Montes and Jose Ruiz,
January 7, 1840**

**National Archives and Records Administration-Northeast Region,
Waltham, MA,
Records of the District Courts of the United States, RG 21**

After the *Amistad* was seized, the schooner, its cargo, and all on board were taken to New London, CT. Had it not been for the actions of abolitionists in the United States, the issues related to the *Amistad* might have ended quietly in an admiralty court. But they used the incident as a way to expose the evils of slavery and generate significant opposition to the practice. Abolitionists asked Roger S. Baldwin, a lawyer from New Haven, and two New York attorneys, Seth Staples and Theodore Sedgewick, to serve as proctors for, or represent, the Africans. The answer to the libels of Lt. Gedney, et. al. and Pedro Montes and Jose Ruiz that the proctors submitted to the district court conveyed the position of the Africans.

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United States of America
District of Connecticut
Special Court holden at New Haven in said
District on the 7th of Jan^y 1840.
To the Honorable Andrew T. Judson Judge
of the District Court of the United States in and for the
District of Connecticut

The several names of Singas Burnah,
Dammah, Fourn 1st otherwise called Foulard, Shuma, Bonoma,
otherwise called, Adrauhel, Charlay, Burnah, 2^d Baah, Poomah,
Kumbe, Paah, Bangyashu, Saah, Bales, Partu, Moomah, Nadi,
quwi, Quato, Sepu, Com otherwise called Koomy, Fourn 2^d otherwise
called Pauli, wa, in, Kinnah, Lamanah, Fajamah, padiboy, Fajamah,
Bernu, Fajamah, Chockman, Gubbo, otherwise called Gulabara,
Carr, Fenu, Kenu & Mahyur Africans, now in the custody
of the Marshall of said District under color of process
issued from this Honorable Court on the 29th day of August
1839 against the Schooner Amistad and the articles of personal
property on board of her then lying in the harbor of New Con-
necticut in said District on the libel of Lieutenant W. R. Geary
a Lieutenant in the United States Navy commanding the United
States Brig Washington in the service of the United States on
the coast survey, and on behalf of Richard M. Meade a Lieut
on board said Brig, and the Officers and crew thereof and
all others interested or entitled, claiming salvage to be awarded
to them by this Honorable Court as for a meritorious service, in ~~libel~~ ^{saving}
and securing the Respondents severally and holding them as slaves
to certain Spaniards belonging to the islands of Cuba, named in

said libels - and also under process of this Honorable Court issued and served, at Hartford on the 13th day of September 1839 while the Respondents were in custody of the Marshall of said District as aforesaid, in at Hartford within the body of the State and District of Connecticut on the libel and claim of William P. Hollister Esq. United States District Attorney for said District of Connecticut and the libels respectively of Pedro Monte & Jose Rivero, and also under process of this Honorable Court issued at Hartford aforesaid on the 19th day of November 1839 on the claim and representation of the said District Attorney then and there made and filed.

The said respondents severally by protestation not admitting or acknowledging that the Government of the United States, any department, Court, or officer thereof hath jurisdiction over the persons of these Respondents or any of them, by reason of any of the allegations & proceedings aforesaid, & not confessing or acknowledging any of the matters & things in the libellants said several libels & claims to be true in manner and form as the same are therein and thereby alleged, appear before this Honorable Court, and for answer to the several libels, claims & representations aforesaid severally say

That they and each of them are nations of Africa and were born free, and ever since have been and still of right are and ought to be free and not slaves, as is in said several libels or claims pretended or surmised - that they were never domiciled on the Island of Cuba or in the dominions of the Queen of Spain, or subject to the laws thereof, that on or about the 15th day of April 1839 they and each of them were in the

lands of their nativity unlawfully kidnaped and forcibly
and wrongfully by certain persons to their destination, who were
then and there unlawfully and piratically engaged in the slave
trade, between the Coast of Africa and the island of Cuba
contrary to the will of these Respondents unlawfully, and under
circumstances of great cruelty, transported to the st island of
Cuba, for the unlawful purpose of being sold as slaves,
and were then illegally landed for the purpose aforesaid.

That Juan Ruiz one of the said Libellants well knowing all
the premises, and confederating with the persons by whom the
Respondents were unlawfully taken and held as aforesaid,
and intending to deprive the Respondents severally of their
liberty, made a pretended purchase of the said Respondents
except the said Carr, Bern, Fern and Mahygo, and that the
said Pedro Monter also well knowing all the premises and
confederating with the said persons for the purpose aforesaid
made a pretended purchase of the said Carr, Bern, Fern &
Mahygo, That said pretended purchase was made from
persons who had no right whatever to the Respondents or any of them
and that the same were null and void, and conferred no
right or title on the said Ruiz or Monter or right of control
over the Respondents or either of them. That afterwards on
or about the 28th day of June 1839 the said Ruiz & Monter
confederating with each other and with one Ramon Fern now
deceased, Capt. of said Schooner Amistad & others of the crew
thereof caused the Respondents severally without law or right and
color of certain false and fraudulent papers by them procured &
fraudently used for that purpose to be placed by force on
board said Schooner to be transported with said Ruiz

and a Monitor to some place unknown to the Respondents and those enslaved for life. — That the Respondents, being treated on board said Tjacks by said River and Monitor, and their confederates with great cruelty and oppression, and being of night free as aforesaid were incited by the love of liberty natural to all men, and by the desire of returning to their families and kindred, to take possession of said Tjacks, while navigating the high seas, as they had right to do with the intent to retaken them to their native Country, or to send ^{secretly} an asylum in some free state where slavery did not exist, in order that they might enjoy their liberty under the protection of its Government — that the Schooner on or about the 26th of August 1839 arrived in the possession of the Respondents at Bullhead Point near Longtang, and was then anchored near the shore of Long Island or within hauling distance thereof and within the waters and territory of the State of New York — that the respondents Tanguar, Corley, Dammah, Baah, Monat, Ahingwa Quate, Coon, Fagannah, Berner, Babbo, Foulan Numbo, Fagannah bonoma otherwise called Adran, Ben, Nyabro, Tammah, Abhamah, Fawmeh, Pat, Pat, Gude, while said Schooner lay at anchor as aforesaid went on shore within the State of New York to procure provisions and other necessaries and while there in a State where slavery is unlawful and does not exist under the protection of the Government, and have of said Tjacks by which they were all free, whether on board of said Schooner, or on shore the Respondents were severally seized, as well those who were on shore as aforesaid as those who were on board of said Schooner by the said Lieut. Gedney, his officers and crew of said United States Brig Washington, without any lawful warrant or authority whatever, at the instance of said Spaniards, River and Monitor, with

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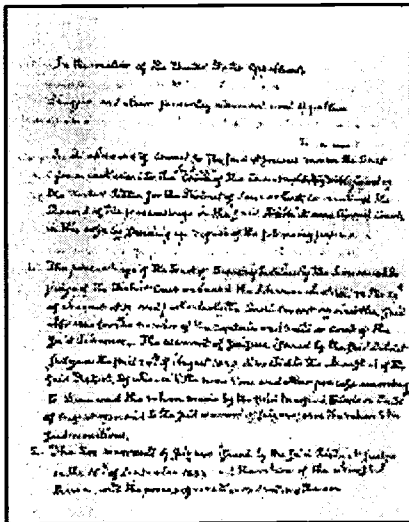
the intent to keep and secure them as slaves, to the said Free and
Honorably respectively, and to obtain an award of salvage therefor from the
Honorable Court as for a meritorious act. That for that purpose the
Respondents were by the said Lieut. Gedney, his officers and crew
aforesaid forcibly and unlawfully withdrawn from the jurisdictional
limits of the State of New York and brought to the port of New Haven
aforesaid and while there and afterwards under the subsequent
proceedings in this Hon. Court taken into the Custody of the Marshal
of said District of Connecticut and confined and held in the
goal in the Cities of New Haven and Hartford respectively as aforesaid.
Wherefore the Respondents severally pray that they and each of
them may be set free, as they of right are and ought to be, and
that they be released from the custody of the Marshal under the
process of this Hon. Court under which or under color of which they
are held as aforesaid.

S. P. Staples, & R. S. Baldwin }
J. T. Sedgwick } Proctors

And at said District Court holden
at New Haven in and to the 7th day of
January A.D. 1840, here in open Court, came
said Antonio Tullies, and the Sons of Asa &
Lucas, subjects of the Queen of Spain, and by
counsel of the Court file their claim in the
under following to wit:



Document #3



John Quincy Adams' request for papers relating to the lower court trials of the *Amistad* Africans, January 23, 1841

National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, RG 267

After the Federal District Court ruled in favor of the Africans, the U.S. District Attorney filed an appeal to the Supreme Court. In the trial before the Supreme Court, the Africans were represented by John Quincy Adams, a former U.S. President and descendant of American revolutionaries. Preparing for his appearance before the Court, Adams requested papers from the lower courts one month before the proceedings opened. For 8 ½ hours, the 73-year-old Adams passionately and eloquently defended the Africans' right to freedom on both legal and moral grounds, referring to treaties prohibiting the slave trade and to the Declaration of Independence.

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In the matter of the United States Appellants

King and others generally claimants and appellants

I, A. Adams, of Counsel for the said Africans, moves the Court for a certiorari to the ^{Judge} Clerk of the Circuit and District Court of the United States for the District of Connecticut, to annul the Record of the proceedings in the said District and Circuit Courts in this case, by sending up copies of the following papers:

1. The proceedings of the Court of Enquiry held by the Honorable Judge of the District Court on board the Schooner ~~Admission~~ on the 29th of August 1839, and particularly the Indictment against the said Africans for the murder of the captain and mate or cook of the said Schooner. The warrant of seizure issued by the said District Judge on the said 29th of August 1839, directed to the Marshal of the said District, together with the motions and other procees according to Law and the return made by the said Marshal ~~on the 30th~~ on the 30th of August aforesaid to the said warrant of seizure; and the return to the said motions.
2. The two warrants of seizure issued by the said District Judge on the 18th of September 1839, and the returns of the Marshal thereon with the procees of motion and return thereon.

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3. The warrant of seizure issued by the said District Court on the 19th of September 1839 and the return of the Marshal thereon.

4. The instructions of the Judge of the Circuit Court to the Grand Jury on the

4. The Bill of Indictment filed by the District Attorney against the said Africans for the murder of the Captain and Cook of the Amistad, and also for piracy; and the proceedings of the Grand Jury, and the instructions of the Circuit Court to the said Grand Jury thereon.

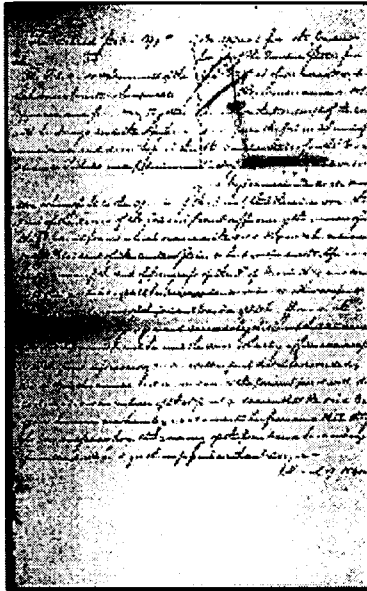
5. The writ of Habeas Corpus in behalf of the said Africans, and on the said 18th or 19th of Sept. 1839 the return and the decision of the said Circuit Court thereon.

J. 2: 1841

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Document #4



Opinion of the Supreme Court in *United States v. The Amistad*, March 9, 1841

National Archives and Records Administration,
Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, RG 267

Senior Justice Joseph Story wrote and read the decision of the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that the Africans on board the *Amistad* were free individuals. Kidnapped and transported illegally, they had never been slaves.

Although Justice Story had written earlier that "... it was the ultimate right of all human beings in extreme cases to resist oppression, and to apply force against ruinous injustice," the opinion in this case more narrowly asserted the Africans right to resist "unlawful" slavery.

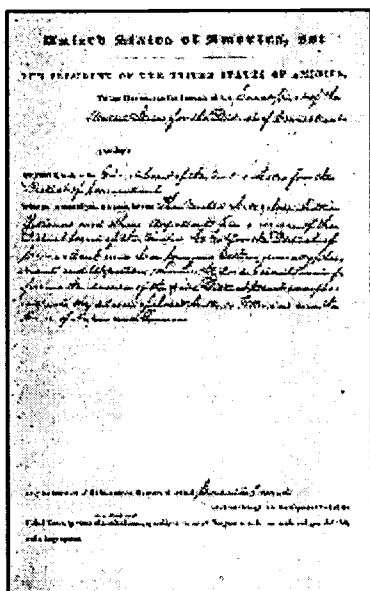
The Court ordered the immediate release of the *Amistad* Africans.

42. The United States. App 5. On appeal from the Circuit Court of the United States for the District of Connecticut. The Libellants & Claimants of the Schooner Amistad, her tackle, apparel and furniture, together with her cargo and the African mentioned and described in the several Libels and Pleas. This cause came on to be heard on the transcript of the record from the Circuit Court of the District of Connecticut and was argued by counsel on consideration whereof it is the opinion of the Court that there is error in that part of the decree of the Circuit Court affirming the decree of the District Court which ordered the said Negroes to be delivered to the President of the United States to be transported to Africa in pursuance of the Act of Congress of the 3^d of March 1819; and that as to that part it ought to be reversed; and in all other respects that the said decree of the Circuit Court ought to be affirmed. It is therefore ordered by this Court that the decree by this Court that the decree of the said Circuit Court be and the same is hereby affirmed except as to the part aforesaid, and as to that part that it be reversed; and that the cause be remanded to the Circuit Court with directions to enter in lieu of that part a decree that the said Negroes be and are hereby declared to be free and that they be dismissed from the custody of the Court and be discharged from the suit and go thereof quit without day. March 9. 1841.

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Document #5



Statement of the Supreme Court to Circuit Court, March 9, 1841

National Archives and Records Administration,
Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, RG 267

Following its decision, the Supreme Court submitted this statement to the lower court where the case originated. The statement indicated that the decision of the circuit court was in part upheld and in part reversed. The part that was upheld related to the freedom of the Africans. The part that was reversed related to Judge Andrew T. Judson's application of the Congressional Act of March 3, 1819. Judson's decision authorized the President to return the Africans to Africa. Ultimately, the abolitionists arranged for their return in early 1842.

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United States of America, vs:

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

To the Honorable the Judges of the Circuit Court of the
United States for the District of Connecticut

greeting:

WHEREAS, lately, in the Circuit Court of the United States for the
District of Connecticut
before you, or some of you, in a case, between The United States, Jose Antonio
Tillman and others Appellants from a decree of the
District Court of the United States for the District of
Connecticut and Jose Pringues and others, several claim-
ants and Appellants, wherein the said Circuit Court af-
firmed the decree of the said District Court in so far as
respects the claims of Jose Antonio Tillman and the
House of Lopez and Lora—

as by the inspection of the transcript of the record of the said Circuit Court

which was brought into the Supreme Court of the

United States, by virtue of a writ of ^{certiorari} agreeably to the act of Congress in such case made and provided, fully
and at large appears.

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And whereas, in the present term of *January* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *forty one* the said cause came on to be heard before the said Supreme Court, on the said transcript of the record, and was argued by counsel; on consideration whereof, *It is the opinion of this Court that there is error in that part of the decree of the Circuit Court affirming the decree of the District Court which ordered the said Negroes to be delivered to the President of the United States to be transported to Africa in pursuance of the Act of Congress of the 3^d of March 1847, and that as to that part it ought to be reversed, and in all other respects that the ^{said} decree of the Circuit Court ought to be affirmed.* It is therefore ordered, adjudged, and decreed by this Court that the decree of the said Circuit Court be and the same is hereby affirmed except as to the part aforesaid, and as to that part, that it be reversed; and that the cause be remanded to the Circuit Court with directions to enter in lieu of that part a decree that the said Negroes be and are hereby declared to be free, and that they be dismissed from the custody of the Court and be discharged from the suit and go thereof quit without day.

March 9th

You, therefore, are hereby commanded that such *further* proceedings be had in said cause, in conformity to the opinion and decree of this Court as according to right and justice, and the laws of the United States ought to be had, the said *Appeal* notwithstanding.

WITNESS the Honorable *Roger B. Taney* Chief Justice of said Supreme Court, the *Second Monday of January* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *forty one*.

Chief of the Supreme Court of the United States.



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